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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQ ELECTION

Summary

-- The announcement of the results of the January 30 legislative elections in Iraq lead front-page coverage of all papers published today, February 14. Other stories highlight King Abdullah's visit to the UAE to take part in the opening of IDEX 2005 and focus on Palestinian-Israeli issues, including Israel's agreement to release 500 Palestinian prisoners tomorrow.

Editorial Commentary

-- "Iraq stands before a new stage: political and party formations under the test"

Semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (02/14) editorializes: "With the announcement of the final results of the Iraq election, one could say that the Iraqi people have taken a qualitative step towards building the new Iraq.. The Iraqi people in its majority went to the ballot boxes to cast their votes in favor of change, freedom, security, stability and the establishment of a modern state away from bigotry and dictatorship.. The political forces that had acquired the trust of the people must not disappoint the people. They must consider their victory a legitimate beginning and a popular authorization for them to assume their responsibilities and duties for which the Iraqi people had voted, foremost among which is the preservation of the unity of Iraq, and the personification of democracy in a coalition that lays the foundations for the new Iraq that would bring security to the people and begin the rebuilding process in a manner that would speed the departure of the foreign troops and provide genuine sovereignty and independence."

-- "Legitimate elections with three quarters"

Daily columnist Jamil Nimri writes on the back-page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (02/14): "The majority acquired by the Unified Shiite List must not tempt its people of having autocratic decision-making power, not if they want the political process to advance. The logic of preserving accord and harmony must be maintained not just with the powers represented in parliament but also with the Sunni factions that had boycotted the elections but want to be party to formulating Iraq's future.. One could say that the legitimacy of the elections was breached to an extent due to the fact that they took place under occupation and amidst the boycott of one of the components of the Iraqi people. This is sufficient to say that the resulting majority must not enjoy complete decision-making freedom on the basis of the number of its members in this parliament. Having said that however, the elections remain a launching pad for the political process.. One must acknowledge the fact that the parliament represents three quarters of the Iraqi people. The remaining quarter cannot just hit its head against the wall and use the occupation as a pretext to stay out of the political negotiations vis--vis Iraq's future. If it does, it will achieve nothing and Iraq will remain prone to blind violence with no hope or horizon. Even if the Americans withdraw tomorrow, this quarter must take into consideration the other three quarters of the Iraqi people, namely the Shiites and the Kurds."

-- "A government for Al-Sistani or for Alawi!"

Chief editor Taher Udwan writes on the back-page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (02/14): "I am still in support of the saying that the elections in Iraq are illegitimate because they took place under occupation and on the basis of the

Bremmer constitution which was founded on the idea of dividing the country.. The elections took place in order to grant legitimacy to the upcoming government that has the responsibility of preparing the new constitution and the final elections early next year. This means that the government will be the point of conflict, which has already started between the political forces, the Shiites and the Kurds, to divide up the cake and achieve the best of profits.. All those who backed the Iraqi elections and legitimized it from outside Iraq, including the United States, prefer a government led by Alawi and having an alliance with Talbani and Barzani. On the ground however, a government formed by Al-Sistani coalition would be closer to the national interests of Iraq than a government formed by Alawi with the Kurds that would strengthen the Kurds' Israel-supported separatist desires in Kerkuk.. Al-Sistani's coalition with the Sunnis and the Shiites may be the only remaining guarantee in the hands of the Iraqis for preserving Iraq's unity while the occupation is there, because this coalition might rectify the concept of the majority as an Arab majority."

-- "The results of the Iraq election"

Center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (02/14) editorializes: "We are all aware of the circumstances that surrounded the legislative elections in Iraq and we all realize that they do not genuinely and completely reflect the will of the Iraqi people. However, the elections went on as best as can be expected under the current situation in that country, whose people are looking for a new beginning that would take them out of the crisis and lead to the shores of safety, freedom, independence and progress. It may be too early to make final impressions about the results of the elections . but it is enough to consider the number of people who exercised their right to vote in order to realize the message that the Iraqi people had sent to everyone, namely that they long for freedom and for self-management.. It is not for us to say that the Sunnis's abstention from the elections was right or wrong, but it definitely made the results what they are today, bringing with them fears and concerns about the political identity of the new Iraq.. In all cases, one cannot overlook the fact that these elections are an achievement without the shadow of a doubt. As for making use of this achievement without falling in the trap of the false feeling of superiority, that is the real test that is going to face all the parties in the Iraqi arena."

HALE